

Stranger Times by rideswraptors

Series: [All My Friends Are Heathens \[2\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Neither one of them was willing to mar his memory with petty life affirmations. But Joyce needed Hopper's comfort, his strength, his easy way with her boys. Bob had patched over the holes Lonnie punched in their lives, but Jim Hopper? Jim Hopper completed their matched set, holes and scars and all. He fit into their lives so seamlessly that no one questioned it.

But he still wouldn't touch her.

Or, that time when El called bullshit on everybody.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

I am beyond done with these reindeer games the
Duffer Brothers are dishing out.
Jopper is obviously endgame
Joyce is obviously El's new mama.
But in this house we respect Bob Newby.

He wouldn't touch her.

Not willingly anyway. They'd both watched Bob die. Watched him
ripped to shreds in front of their very eyes. They'd both seen each
other's faces when they realized he was gone.

Joyce lost her last chance at normalcy.

Hopper lost the only reassurance he had that the Byers were doing
okay.

Neither one of them was willing to mar his memory with petty life
affirmations. But Joyce needed Hopper's comfort, his strength, his
easy way with her boys. Bob had patched over the holes Lonnie
punched in their lives, but Jim Hopper? Jim Hopper completed their
matched set, holes and scars and all. He fit into their lives so
seamlessly that no one questioned it.

But he still wouldn't touch her.

Not in conscious daylight. Sometimes, he and El stayed so late at the Byers' place that they just slept over. There was a trundle in Will's bedroom where El would sleep. Sometimes Joyce and Hop would stay up later than necessary just to listen to their not-so-subtle whispers and giggling. Sometimes there wasn't much giggling at all because they were the only two people in the world who understood the true horror of the Upside Down, and sometimes they just needed to talk to one another. Joyce had never been so grateful for another human being in her life. Despite her strangeness, El was a godsent angel for her little boy, and she was slowly and surely helping him to heal with her kindness and understanding.

At first, Hop had insisted on the couch. He'd refused her offer to take her bed. She'd fallen asleep on that couch often enough to be used to it. But still, no, he'd take the couch time and again. It wasn't until the fifth week in a row that he flopped onto lumpy, caved-in sofa that Joyce left the comfort of her own bed to pull him out of his. She went to him silently, nudging his side with her knee and holding out her hand to him when he blinked up at her.

He'd let her lead him to her bed, where they slept innocently next to one another. Joyce, extremely conscious of his presence, hadn't slept as well as she would have liked. But she slept better knowing he was more comfortable. She maintained nearly an arm's length of distance the whole night and smiled at him when he woke the next morning. She offered him coffee as if nothing was out of the ordinary and went about her day.

But it wasn't ordinary. None of it was ordinary. He wouldn't go into her room voluntarily after that, but followed when she held out her hand to him. Distance was difficult to maintain after that first night. Joyce was too tired to keep up with pretenses, so she would zonk out, only to wake up in his arms. They drifted together in their sleep, his arms heavy around her, legs intertwined. Sometimes he would spoon her, face nuzzled into her neck. Sometimes she would wake up with

the steady beat of his heart under her cheek. Sometimes they rolled together, face to face, foreheads touching and nothing else.

It carried on like this for several months until Wednesday became the designated sleepover night. Through the Snow Ball and Christmas, New Years, a rather blustery February, and a cold March. Right on through April, when the snow let up and shoots of green broke through the ground.

It was an average Wednesday when Joyce and El had ended up alone in the house while Jonathan and Hop went to pick up Will and dinner. It had been warm enough for Will to ride his bike safely for some weeks, but the rain was really coming down hard, and he'd called for backup. Joyce was clearing the table as El sat and did the assignments sweet Nancy Wheeler had designed for her.

"Joyce?" she asked softly, that innate sweetness seeping from her voice.

"Yeah honey?"

"I have a mama."

"Yes, you do. I've met her, remember?" she reminded her gently, not sure where this was heading. She set the stack of looming bills on the counter, away from any potential mishaps. Then she turned to face El, bracing herself on the counter with her hands, waiting. El tapped her pencil against the side of her chin, watching Joyce intently as that big brain of hers puzzled its way through whatever process had started. They had all learned it was best not to presume to know

what she was thinking, best to let her come around to them instead of forcing the words out. Sometimes she just didn't have the words. Sometimes she was too scared to have them. And sometimes...well, sometimes she was just a little girl with too much weight on her shoulders and they needed to cut her some slack.

"But she is...not...here. Not gone, but not here."

"That's right. Her mind's been hurt a lot. But you can see her and your Aunt Becky real soon, okay?"

El nodded, silent for another long moment.

"Papa was my papa...but now....now Hopper is my papa..." she trailed off. From the look on her face, subtle as it was, Joyce was starting to realize El was going this slowly for *Joyce's* sake, not her own. This was important and El wanted her to understand.

"Yeah honey, he is."

"Will and Jonathon's papa isn't here either. And you're their mama." Joyce nodded again. She didn't need to know what confidences Will had placed in his friend, didn't need to interfere. She, Max, and those boys had a bond tighter than she'd ever seen before. In anyone. Will probably trusted her with everything.

"So...can you...You don't have a daughter."

Joyce felt her throat constrict, her chest clenched so tightly she thought she would faint. Oh that poor thing. Poor, confused little girl who everyone seemed to want for the wrong reasons. This was just one last piece in the puzzle and Joyce would be damned not to give it to her. She quickly moved around to the other side of the table and gathered the girl up in a tight hug. She bent and pressed a kiss to her head and whispered into her hair, just as her own mother had done when she was little.

“Yes, I do, El,” she promised, “You were mine the day you came home to us, do you hear me? You’ll always be a daughter to me. Always. Names and blood and distance won’t change that at all.” She pulled back, stroking her hair back so that they could look each other in the eye, “Do you understand what I’m saying, El? I’m your mama as long as you want me.”

El was crying silently, nodding as she dove in for another hug. She buried her face into Joyce’s chest, sobbing.

“What’s all this? What happened?” Hopper’s sharp, angry voice broke through their pleasant, bonding moment. And yes, Joyce was irritated to see him and her son’s watching them slack jawed and apprehensive, interrupting when they should have been dilly dallying like always, but she wasn’t nearly as angry as El. Joyce felt the energy thrum under her hands, a slight shock as the lights flared brightly and the doors in the house slammed shut around them. Joyce jumped and Will squeaked, but Jonathon only laughed as Hopper rolled his eyes and tossed the pizza boxes on the table.

“What’d I do this time?” he sighed, putting his hands to his hips and dropping his head. Joyce was bewildered by his near-instant

submission to the little thing still trembling in her arms. Obviously this was a repetitive scenario for them. El thrust an accusing finger at him.

“Stop being stupid!”

“Who said I was?” he snapped back her, the full force of his attention on his adoptive daughter.

“Me!” she shouted, stamping her foot and moving away from Joyce. Father and daughter stared each other down, both confusingly furious. The Byers watched the oncoming storm in silent horror. The two of them seemed to be having a non-verbal argument they’d had before, all conducted through eyebrow raises, frowns, and nostril flares. From where Joyce stood, Hop didn’t seem to be backing down until El growled her frustration.

“ *Stupid* !” she shrieked, “She’s my mama. You’re *their* papa !” she threw a finger at Will and Jonathon, who looked equally confused (thankfully). “And you’re being *stupid* !” Her accusation was so shrill that a lightbulb exploded in another room. The boys sprinted to go clean it up, anything to not be in that room in that moment. Joyce envied them because neither one of them seemed to be simmering down.

“You’re just a kid, El, you don’t know shit.”

“Bullshit!” A word she got from Dustin, no doubt.

“HEY! Watch your mouth! It’s *complicated!* ” he bandied back.

“Then you’re a mouth breather,” El informed him snootily, and Hopper scrunched up his face in frustrated anger that he couldn’t express properly in that moment. Joyce nearly snorted at El getting the upperhand so easily, even if she didn’t understand what was happening.

“You and me!” he shouted grumpily, “Bedroom! *Now!* ”

He pushed her, protesting the whole way, into Will’s bedroom at the end of the hall. Their shouting drifted back to the kitchen, muffled as it was. Joyce still didn’t have any idea what was going on. Well, she had some idea. She didn’t know what El knew about it, or why it was an argument...

“She wants us to be a family, mom,” Will said, walking back into the kitchen. He sat in his usual spot, pulled a pizza box to him and served himself as if he hadn’t just blown a hole in his mother’s world. “She knows how he feels about you.”

“What are you talking about?” she scoffed, sitting down across from him. Will just stared blankly at her, like she was the mouth breather. She slumped, maybe she was. Her spirits were bolstered by Jonathon who drew a hand across her shoulders as he sat down next to her.

“Don’t worry about it. El’s just being a brat.”

“She is not!”

“Is too!”

“Not!”

“What do you two even know about any of this?”

They both dropped into a convenient silence, replacing chattiness with eating pizza. Her flipping sons and their wall of silence. Obviously El trusted her boys implicitly and was able to entrust them with things too. She wondered how long the mama/papa/family issue had been a sore point for her. Weeks? A few months? The whole time?

Joyce opened her mouth to ask, but was interrupted by El and Hopper’s re-entrance into the kitchen. The girl seemed a little less plagued, but Hopper looked...defeated. Joyce wasn’t sure how she felt about that. Whatever the point of the argument, Joyce was somehow involved in it. Will easily diverted them with nonsensical conversation topics, drawing both El and Jonathan in, even getting some of Joyce’s attention. The rest of it was on Hopper, who was brooding, and was giving one word answers no matter what the question was. It didn’t sit well with her, his sudden mood swing.

The kids ran off to play video games, and Jonathan begged off to go meet up with Nancy, leaving Joyce and Hopper to clean up after dinner. They stood side by side, washing the used plates and glasses, tossing out what needed tossing out. Joyce was feeling like her skin was too tight and her curiosity was about to burst out wherever it

could.

“Care to share what that fight was all about?” she asked as evenly as she could. Not very even, actually, but at least she got the words out.

“It wasn’t a fight,” Hopper grumbled, tossing the carton of juice back into the fridge.

“Coulda fooled me,” she scoffed, leaning against the counter, waiting. Much like the little girl he took care of, Jim Hopper wouldn’t talk until he damn well pleased. And if forced, he’d spout bullshit until you backed off. Joyce just wasn’t in the mood.

“Kid has...ideas,” he gestured fruitlessly toward his head, clearly annoyed. “It’s nothing. She’ll get over it.”

Joyce scowled, “Get over *what* , exactly?”

With a heavy sigh, the chief of police completely deflated. It wasn’t often that it happened. That all the fight just went out of him and he got all compliant and talkative. It happened a lot more, lately, but it wasn’t that frequent. Joyce’s nightmares had gotten bad. Really, really bad. And Hop didn’t even need to ask anymore. Didn’t need her to confirm that she’d had a bad night again. He dragged a hand through his hair, pulled it down his neck.

“You n’ me,” he grumbled, his cheeks looking a little redder than usual. “She’s got this... *thing* about family.” His next gesture was just

this side of pleading. “It’s not her fault, she don’t mean anything by it. She just...”

“Wants a family. A real family,” Joyce finished.

Hopper finally looked up at her, looking a little lost, a little sad, “Yeah. She thinks,” he gestured between them, “That it’s not a real family unless we’re together.”

“Together,” she echoed stupidly.

He took a step toward her, “Married.”

“Married.”

He crossed that short distance to stand arm’s length away from her. Their constant when conscious. He leaned against the counter, too, looking her in the eye. There was something unreadable about him, and yet it was all so obvious. Hopper wasn’t the kind to hide things, to beat around the bush. He said what he felt, and did what he did, and at the end of the day tried to fix whatever he’d broken along the way. He was a good man, with good intentions, and he’d spent the past few months letting her get through her grief. Letting her work through her pain, her sons’ pain. He’d stayed without asking anything of her, except a few meals and a mattress for his kid.

Their kid.

Joyce reached out uselessly for the edge of his shirt, grasping for a moment before letting go, patting it smooth again. She watched his face soften, watched his eyes widen just a fraction.

“You know,” she said, fighting the dryness in her throat, “Nancy tells me that El is already working at a high school level. After just a few months, she’s caught up with the boys. Maybe even surpassed them.”

Hopper cleared his throat, “Yeah. Kid’s smart.” He frowned, emphasizing his implied *so what* ?

Joyce smirked a little, “Yeah. She really is. Probably smarter than us, too.” Those eyes of his got wider, and she saw his nostrils flare just slightly. Not in anger this time. His eyes were locked on her, and it made her flush a bright red. There was a reason he’d never witnessed her nightmares, a reason they ended up twined around each other in her bed once a week. There was a reason he wouldn’t fucking touch her.

“Definitely,” he agreed quietly. Her immediate reaction to his eyes dropping to her lips was to dart her tongue out to wet them. “*Fuck it*,” he growled under his breath. Joyce’s hands went to his face as he took that last decisive step, closing the distance between them. She had to go up on her toes and he bent down so their lips could meet with a desperate spark of intensity Joyce had never felt with Bob. Good, sweet, attentive Bob, who never took risks until he met the Byers. Lovely, good Bob who had loved her and her boys. But Bob was gone, and it wouldn’t have lasted. Because Joyce Byers was a broken thing, and only a broken thing could hold her.

Hopper's arms went tight around her lower back, and he lifted her easily. Set her on the counter so they were nose to nose. Joyce angled her head and wrapped her arms around his neck to pull him closer, opening up for him as he pushed himself between her legs. Shit, the kids were in the other room, but she couldn't stop herself, couldn't make him stop touching her. He was gentle and attentive, but hungry and unyielding. He didn't give her a moment to catch her breath, not a moment to think as he swept his tongue through her mouth, coaxing her into a boneless puddle against the rigid wall of him.

"Told you!" El's shout drifted into the kitchen, making the two of them jump apart. Joyce let out a shrill giggle, startled and a little giddy. Hopper scowled and ran a frustrated hand through his hair.

"Grounded!" he shouted back at her. "You are so completely grounded!"

"Not!"

"A month!"

"You're welcome!"

"Forever!"

"Are you guys moving in now?" Will shouted, interrupting the pissing contest. Hopper raised his hands in defeat and dropped them on either side of her, bringing them eye to eye again.

“I blame you for this,” he whispered, feigning irritation. Joyce bit her bottom lip, smiling at him stupidly. For fuck’s sake, his face was too handsome for words. She lifted her hands to it, brushing her fingers over his cheeks and jawline.

“It’s a conspiracy,” she teased.

Hop grinned at her, eyes lighting up as he pressed a brief but sweet kiss to her lips, “I kinda like this one.” Joyce used her legs to bring him back to her, flush against her where he belonged now.

“Does that mean you’ll stay?”

“Tonight?”

She rolled her eyes, “Sure, Hop, that’s what I meant. Tonight.”

Hop descended on her hungrily, all but devouring her mouth with his, nipping and tugging. Toying with her, really, until she let out a frustrated groan and pushed back against him, urging him to kiss her more deeply. His hands went to her waist, clenching and then sliding down to squeeze her ass. She rocked her hips against him, squirming to get closer, even at that frustrating angle.

“Stay forever,” she breathed out against his lips.

“Anything you want, Joy.” Hopper pulled back only long enough to shove his face into her neck, kissing and nuzzling there as she hugged him to her.

“So is El my sister or what?” Will demanded petulantly from the other room.

They both dipped their heads back, rolling their eyes.

“YES!”

2. Chapter 2

They waited until the kids were in bed. Until Jonathan jogged through the door claiming he was just under curfew (he wasn't). Hopper almost let him have it until Joyce slid between them and took Jonathan's camera off him.

"Two days."

"*Mom.*"

"Just because you've uncovered a government conspiracy and killed monsters doesn't mean you have total latitude. I said 11:30 and I meant it!" The boy opened his mouth to argue, but let out a groan instead and stomped off to his bedroom. He didn't slam the door, but that meant he was blasting music through his headphones.

"Yelling doesn't work with him," she said quietly with a shrug, "Lonnie..." Joyce sighed and set the camera aside. She felt a little better when Hop came up behind her, sliding his arms around her waist.

"I don't know how you do it," he muttered in her hair before placing a kiss on her temple, "Manage not to strangle them." Joyce smiled and leaned back into him, letting herself enjoy the surety of his bulk.

"Practice," she informed him, "A pack a day and a meltdown on Mondays."

He huffed a short laugh, “At least it’s routine?” Joyce let out a real laugh at that and turned in his arms, letting her hands slide up his chest.

“Speaking of routine..” she bit her lip, hoping it was at least cute if not quite sexy. Could a mother of 2 grown boys really be sexy? Question of the year really. Hop laughed at her, but his arms tightened around her

“That was terrible.”

She shrugged, “Bit rusty.”

He was about to send back some pithy retort, but Joyce cut him off by dragging his face down to hers. She didn’t hesitate to deepen the kiss, spreading his lips so she could get access to the lower one. He really was a good kisser. Not that Bob hadn’t been. *Damn that thought* . One minute in and she was making comparisons. But still. Hop kissed her like he was desperate for it. Like he wanted to crawl inside her and live there. Bob did everything to make her feel good. Which was nice. Polite. But not—

Hop’s hands had drifted down to her ass, squeezing before sliding up under her shirt and back down again. Fuck, he’d always been so good with her. But now he was patient, more refined. Less fumbling. He licked into her mouth with practiced ease, set a pace that was lovely and dizzying and not rushed at all. His beard scraped at her oversensitive skin, made her think of other places it could scrape against. Joyce savored it. Savored the heat rolling off him. Savored how whole and solid he was. She sighed happily into his mouth,

nipped and tugged at his lip.

“I’d really like you naked right now,” she tossed out brazenly. She figured direct and blunt would be best from here on out. Hop had never been one for subtle clues.

“Kids,” he argued breathily before slanting his mouth over hers again. Despite his protest, he edged her closer to the wall, trapping her there. She loved that she felt small and safe. Protected, she thought, as he bent to lift her. Wanted. His hands cupped her thighs, fingers spreading and squeezing as he pushed into the space she made for him.

“Pretty sure,” she panted out as his mouth moved along her cheek to her ear, “They planned-- *shit* --” He nosed down to her neck licking and nipping at the sensitive skin there. “Planned this.” She let out a low whine when he jerked his hips up into her, that delicious friction made her chest heat up, made her toes curl under. *Fuck* , she’d wanted this with Bob so badly. She’d wanted things to work with him even if they weren’t perfect. He was so reliable and steady and *giving* . And Jim Hopper was a fucking mess. The drinking, the pills, the long string of scorned women, decades of emotional baggage, and now a teenage daughter with psychic abilities. He was *so not* the appropriate choice.

But?

But.

“ *Bedroom* , Hop, now.”

With a grunt, he pulled her from the wall, taking all of her weight. She clung on tight, kissing his face and neck as he navigated her mess of a house. Hop shut her door behind them, pushed her up against it while he locked it. Joyce ducked in to kiss him again, long and deep loving presses, trying to tell him what she was feeling without the words. Words sucked. They didn't mean anything anymore. *This* meant something.

"Hop?" she panted out, not a little desperately.

"Yeah baby?" He was at her pulse point now, nipping lightly and licking to soothe. Joyce felt herself melting, felt the heat pooling at her center.

"Can we just--? *Shit* !" She bucked against him. "Would you just--?" She let out a laughing groan.

"Patience *Joycie* ," he teased, hands gripping her tight and pulling her against him with a long drag. She pinched him in retaliation.

"Don't call me that!"

He smirked, his chuckle low and gritty, "But that's what Lonnie--!" His voice was insistent and full of sarcasm because Lonnie had been such a *dick* even in high school when he was wooing her away from Hop. Not that it had been difficult. Hop had no designs on staying in Hawkins, never made her any promises. They were best friends fooling around when they got bored. This was...well, it was different

this time.

“Oh fuck you, Jim,” she grumbled. That’s when Hop decided to swing her away from the door and tossed her on the bed. He followed her down after a bounce, climbing on top of her to kiss her open-mouthed and dirty as hell, beard recklessly scraping her skin.

“Please fucking do,” he rumbled against her lips. Their eyes locked for one intense moment, until Joyce brought her hands up to his face. She cupped it like she had in the tunnels, trying to get him to focus. The tension finally snapped, and they grabbed for each other’s clothes, using a little more force than strictly necessary. They ducked and dodged fabric, moving in to kiss when they were able.

But they weren’t kids anymore. They weren’t in any rush, there was no pressure here. God, just the closeness was enough. Just the skin contact was enough to set her on fire and soothe that ache that had settled into her bones since November. It had slowly been eating away at her, gnawing at her, kept back only by her Wednesday nights with Hop and the kids. Held back only by Hop holding her through the night and never asking for more. She wanted more now.

Hop didn’t give her what she wanted, not right away. He pulled one knee up over his hip and ground his hardness down into her middle, teasing but not appeasing. She tried to snake her hands down, but he stopped her.

“Nuh uh,” he hummed into her chest, “On my shoulders, Joy.” She rolled her eyes, but any protest was cut off when he ducked to latch onto her breasts. He sucked and licked, making her moan and arch against him. When she came up, he pushed down, giving her just enough friction to keep her pacified while he worked. She was

already so wet, she could feel it, knew she was more than ready. Still, he resisted, not even using his hands on her.

No, those hands moved over the rest of her body. Reverently, systematically. He was lighting her up, burning his mark on her, banishing memories of Lonnie, Bob, any of the other random men she'd been with to stave off her loneliness.

“Joyce,” he whispered, licking a line under her breast before moving back to her mouth. “You’ve got no idea...” Breaking his rule, she brought her hands back to his face, smothering his words with a kiss, hungry for it, eager for the contact. She only caught pieces, which she punctuated with rolls of her hips up against his. *So goddamn long. Want...so bad. Fucking love...* He was so big above her, covering her protectively, moving over her. Joyce felt like she was drowning.

She hardly heard his comment about protection, but she honestly couldn't have cared less. She just babbled senselessly, trying to get him to hurry up, to just take her already. Hop was too far gone, his pupils blown wide, jaw clenched, to tease her for being so needy. He encircled one of her thighs with his arm, pushing back just enough to make room before he thrust sharply into her, fully seated. They gasped together, Joyce nearly tearing up at how good it felt. Hop rocked over her, trying to push in deeper with every thrust. Their rhythm was steady, even paced. Joyce clawed at him, begging him in slurred whispers, and the mattress complained almost as much as she did every time he pulled back. Frustrated, Joyce put her feet flat on the mattress and pushed up, clenching down and twisting her hips. She thought he'd curse, resist her as much as possible. But he didn't.

He *growled* .

That sound was low and feral and set her skin on fire. She felt that blessedly perfect pressure at the base of her spine, felt the way it fought up and out of her. It sparked something in him too. Hop quickened his pace, arms cradling her tightly as he brought his weight down. He pounded into her, that eager growl ripping up through his throat as he took and took and took. It was so fucking good . So good she couldn't keep quiet, couldn't keep her voice down. His big paw of a hand flashed out of nowhere, covering her mouth easily as he kept going. That high-handed, bossy gesture had her coming harder than she had in years. She had to bite his hand to keep quiet. Her muscles clenched so tight she thought she would pass out before she could properly enjoy the come down. Hop wasn't too far behind her, pushing in and in and in, moving her back on the bed so that she nearly hit the headboard as he spilled into her. He thrust into her twice more, stilted but hard, sending aftershocks down to the tips of her toes.

And then they were still, panting, covered in sweat, and maybe a little startled by the intensity of what just happened between them. Joyce revelled his weight on her, even if it wasn't totally comfortable. The deep pressure was nice, reassuring. She cradled his head on her shoulder, running her fingers through his hair and kissing his bearded cheek.

"I'm crushing you," he grumbled, making her laugh when he didn't even try to move. It was getting a little difficult to breathe.

"Just a bit."

"If I open my eyes, you're not gonna disappear are ya?" he sighed, "Cause let me tell you, those dreams are getting old."

She giggled and bit at his ear, “Not a dream, *chief* .” There was that growl again. “But I will be unconscious soon...” He whined a little at that, but moved anyway. He pulled out of her and rolled to the side. Joyce clambered after him, settling into his waiting arms. Hop situated her half on top of him, leg stretched over his hip, head cushioned in that soft spot between shoulder and chest.

“Eyes open yet?” she teased.

“Shut up.”

Joyce drew circles on his chest, feeling out the difference between his chest hair and skin. She smiled to herself, she didn’t remember him being this hairy, but it made sense. Big Papa Bear Hopper. She blushed at the stupid thought.

“What?” he murmured sleepily, hand rubbing up and down her exposed side. She shivered, and that was all the notice he needed before he was pulling up her thick comforter, bringing it around them both.

“Nothing,” she lied with a happy sigh, nuzzling into him, “Just happy you’re here.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” she pressed a kiss to his chest. “I kinda love you.”

He hummed and she heard his head drop more fully onto her pillow, “Yeah, well, I kinda love you too.”

They were quiet for a long while, so long that Joyce was convinced he was asleep. But then his pathetic groan broke the silence.

“ *Shit* .”

“What now?”

“The kid,” he grouched, “I forgot...goddamn diabolical...”

“Hop, what the hell are you babbling about?”

He let out a heavy sigh and pressed a kiss to the top of her head, which only prompted her to look up at him. So he kissed her lips too, a rueful smile resting there.

“Nothing. Crisis for another day.”

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Morning after.

Notes for the Chapter:

Some smut. Then some fluff.

I'm trying to keep the sex and the kids as separated as possible. I still feel icky putting sex too close to them.

You can find me on tumblr so we can cry about Jopper and related things: rideswraptors
(Yes, I have fixed the search problem, many apologies.)

Joyce woke up, bleary eyed, long before her alarm went off. As always. She and Hop had rolled in the night, so that his big body had hers trapped against the mattress. He'd curled himself around her, draped his limbs over her like a blanket. Despite herself, and her currently numb foot, she kind of liked the possessiveness of it. Lonnie had always sprawled out. Bob kept a polite distance. But this was just like Hop, invasive and protective. And unsurprisingly, she had slept through the night again.

She stirred a little under him, trying to resetttle and get comfortable. It was enough to wake him. He rumbled out an apology, taking some of his weight off of her, but kept her gathered up against him. Joyce twisted in his grasp, turned so that they were face to face and she could stroke his beard.

He was half asleep when she kissed him. Even in his semi-conscious state, Hop sought after her heat, her closeness. He was lax and loose around her, but insistent.

“Only 4. More sleep,” he grumbled, even as he nuzzled against her mouth. Joyce chuckled, letting her hand glide up and down his side.

“And what if I want you again before the kids wake up?” she asked coyly, lips teasing.

His eyes flashed open at that. Hot and heavy on her. Joyce couldn’t stop that spark of satisfaction. A small victory.

“Dangerous game, Higgins, you sure you’re up for it?”

Joyce cackled at the use of her maiden name. Nobody called her that anymore. She loved it. But her laugh was cut off by Hop diving in to kiss her. That was how they met actually, in the first grade. Higgins and Hopper, one right after the other. Her jog down memory lane was cut short when Hopper pulled her over to straddle him. She hummed, situating herself on her perch, edging her hips forward. He just watched her, hands eagerly grasping her thighs, waiting. With a smirk, Joyce stretched her arms up teasingly.

She wasn’t what she used to be. No more sharp angles and hard planes. Her skin was looser, she carried pregnancy weight and the scars to prove it. But he was just as changed. Just as scarred. And besides, he watched her like she was the sun coming up through the trees. Touched her with a reverence she’d not experienced before. Gentle but desperate. So she curled forward, kissing him wet and messy, letting him push back her hair as she moved on top of him.

Then he let her hair fall like a curtain around them. He snaked a hand back to curve over her ass and squeeze. He kept it moving until his long fingers teased at her folds, reached for her clit. That's when his hand clamped around the back of her neck, bracing her down on top of him while he worked her. His arms kept her trapped there, nowhere to go and nothing to do but let him do as he pleased. Let him take her where he wanted to go. His hips bucked up against her, so she swivelled them back, looking for his heat, wanting his fingers inside her instead of teasing. No matter where she moved, Hop was there, giving her a counter point. Making her feel good and reckless and needy. She brought her mouth back to his, kissing him in time with his hand on her. That is until she bit down on his bottom lip.

With not much force at all, she pulled up and he let her go. She rewarded that with a sweet, little kiss to the corner of his mouth. Then she sat up and held out her hands.

“Hands please.”

Immediately, his hands were in hers. She took the fingers that had been in her and licked them clean, pressing loving kisses to each one.

“*Joyce*,” he hissed warningly, eyes locked on her. Joyce just laughed and used his hands as leverage to help her sit down on him, swallowing up the whole of his hard length as she went. He let out a long laundry list of expletives as she clenched and twisted to make herself comfortable.

“Well aren’t you just goddamn perfect.”

But she only hummed and started to move on him, working him slowly, making small adjustments for her own pleasure. It felt more like a game: How long could Hopper hold out against her? She smiled down at him, that dangerous flirty smile that always seemed to get her into so much trouble, and his eyes narrowed. For a short second, she thought he'd call it quits, take back control and fuck her into the mattress. But he didn't. He threaded their fingers together, brow furrowed and eyes locked on her, completely passive. Joyce thought stupidly that she probably could have climaxed if she just reached down to touch herself while he watched. Another party for another day.

Clenching his hands tight in hers, she moved steadily, back and forth and ending with a twist. She moved up with a clench and down with a swivel, dancing along the length of him. Hopper watched her the whole time, face flushed and biting his lip so hard it looked like it would bleed. Eventually Joyce was getting him right where she wanted him, the thick of him rubbing and pounding against that sensitive spot. She dropped her head back to moan before picking up the pace, letting go of her rhythm completely. Underneath her Hop was babbling something under his breath, but she was just this side of too far gone and didn't hear any of it.

Her orgasm burned her. Ripped through her like molten quicksilver, making her whole body tighten and clench. Her mouth dropped open in a soundless scream, only for Hopper to jerk himself up to take advantage of it. He wrapped an arm around her neck, kissing her hard and messy, using what leverage he had to thrust up into her just to keep her on her high. And slap her silly if it didn't. Her next orgasm came in quick succession, sharp and painful, and it left her shuddering against him as he sought his own release. Hop had to do all the work, bouncing and rocking her against him to get off. Joyce just clung to him limply, kissing his neck and face when she could.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit," he chanted as he spilled into her, hugging her

to him and trying to push in deeper. Joyce thought it was probably the most perfect place in the world to be, especially when he turned her face to kiss her again, letting them fall back against the pillows. They kissed lazily for a long time, Hopper still inside her, until he hardened again. He found his next release with a few sharp thrusts before he laughingly tossed her onto her back and shoved his face between her thighs. She kept up steady stream of sighs and whispered praise, her hand in his hair and trying very hard to keep still. He wasn't having it though. His big hands wandered up her sides, beard scraping the thin skin of her thighs, his eyes locked on her face. Joyce whimpered a bit, shutting her eyes to it. She couldn't handle it. Couldn't handle *him* . Not like this. Not this much. Her release was sluggish, small, but so so nice.

Hopper crawled up along her, pressing kisses to her sweaty skin by increments until he reached her lips. Joyce had only a second to think about the filthy implications before she melted into it.

Eventually she broke it off and let herself sprawl out and stretch. She felt like a well contented, lazy cat. If that cat was on the receiving end of three orgasms before breakfast.

"Good god we need to shower," she grumbled, taking in the state of things. He lifted his head, a brow raised like he'd just been challenged. Joyce kicked at him. "Shut up. Just showering."

They stumbled into the bathroom together and realized as they waited for the water to warm up that they each had some interesting bruises in interesting places. Joyce laughed and said he was just as bad when they were kids, only for him to threaten to give her another one in a more noticeable location. She ducked out of the way as his hands reached for her hips, and took refuge in the now-warm shower.

He followed right behind her, taking up what little space remained. She'd forgotten how small it was. Hop didn't seem to care in the least. He ushered her under the spray and took what products she handed him to wash her. Like everything else, they worked in tandem, maneuvering around each other like it was old hat. Joyce just enjoyed getting her hands on him with no expectations. She liked the different textures of skin and hair, water and soap. It was just *pleasant*. And he didn't seem to have any modesty in the least, let her do with him as she pleased, laughed when she made him duck his head to wash his hair. But eventually he deemed it too much work and took over.

And she *loved* his hands on her. Big and rough and moving with purpose. He massaged her scalp and hair like it was all he wanted to do that day, and Joyce nearly melted into a puddle of goo for him. He rinsed her hair thoroughly and then moved it to the side to kiss her neck. She hummed and leaned back into him, letting her take his weight. She felt her heartbeat quicken, her thoughts raced like they always did. But he was the one who spoke.

"Damn, how do you still make me so nervous?" he muttered against her skin. His big hands slid up her body to cover her breasts as she craned her neck to look up at him. The Jim Hopper she'd known had never been afraid of anything. He hadn't been afraid of being alone. Of being an outcast. Of not finishing school. Of the war. Of guns or criminals or authority figures. That version of Jim Hopper had rushed headlong into a lot of dangerous situations. Lonnie said once that Hop had a death wish, and he was just waiting for his opportune moment. Fist fights in school, burning things in the woods. Then came the war. He volunteered. *Twice*. When he came back, he threw himself back in the line of fire as a cop. She didn't know much about his life in those years, but she could imagine being a street cop's day to day in Indianapolis. Not as bad as Chicago, maybe, but still. Then came Diane and Sarah.

The one time Joyce had met Diane, she'd told her that Hopper was having a breakdown. Drinking, pain pills, putting himself in harm's way. He was breaking up knife fights, got himself shot, and generally being reckless with himself. The poor woman had shrugged, not sure what to do with any of it. His daughter had just died, maybe it was a phase? Coping? There wasn't much to be done about it.

His Hawkins persona had been altogether different. Burying himself in booze and pills and women without the violence. All he did in Hawkins was rough up some old drunks, toss teenagers in the drunk tank, and hunt down stolen property. There wasn't much else he could do, not much trouble to be found. But he'd done just fine sniffing that trouble out. Hunted down every lead Joyce gave him, put himself right in the line of fire. Installed himself in the thick of her chaos just to help out.

When had anyone taken care of him? Just forced him to stop and rest and not take on the world? She reached around to cut off the water and led him out of the shower. Hop was watching her closely, curious, but she ignored it. Instead, she toweled him dry and wrapped that towel around him. She did the same for herself and led him back to the bedroom. She helped him redress, let him self her do the same. The whole process slowed when she got to his buttons, buttoning them one at a time, carefully.

It was her job, now, she thought very quietly, taking care of this man. She'd been entrusted with his heart and mind, entrusted to help mend that heart and keep it safe.

"What's wrong?" he asked her quietly. But Joyce only shook her head. Nothing was wrong. Everything was just as it should have

been.

“I’m good.”

He smiled, tucking hair behind her ear before leaning down to kiss her firmly.

“Good.”

*

“Does this mean you’re getting married?” Will asked, being an obvious smart ass. Jonathan hid a smile behind a glass of orange juice while Joyce did a spit take. Hopper just glared at the kid. They were all sitting at the table, Hopper having made breakfast while Joyce heckled. The kids had filed in one by one, making weird eye contact with each other and trying to be quiet. The effort had been appreciate, no matter how short-lived.

He’d seen this coming with El. He’d *hoped* Will would be less of a shit. He gave him that look he gave the dumbass teenagers around town: *I will end you and smile about it* . Will didn’t seem overly convinced though, so Hopper could only wonder when he’d lost his touch. Well, lost his touch with his daughter’s friends anyway. Actually, a small part of Hopper was intensely smug. Lonnie’s kid *trusted* him. Lonnie’s kid hated Lonnie and trusted Jim Hopper, even when he was being an asshole. Who’d have thought it? Another part was stupidly proud that the kid was less wilting. Less intimidated. Hard to be intimidated by grown men when a monster had literally

lived inside you for a year, he supposed. He lifted his brows quickly at Will, who just smirked and went back to eating.

“I think you should get married in the summer. Warm and sunny,” El mused.

“You do understand that this is *not* how it works, right?” Hopper asked, spreading his hands wide. It was a bit pleading, a bit desperate, but it was too damn early in the morning to be having this conversation with a bunch of kids. Joyce looked like she was trying very hard not to laugh at everything. Hop, himself, was conflicted. Given that he’d just gotten laid properly for the first time in over a year, he was pretty damn pleased with himself. Given that it was Joyce Byers, the animal that lived in his chest was placated. But at the same time, he was annoyed as shit that these kids knew so damn much and were so comfortable teasing him. What had happened to his fearsome persona? What had happened to his lone ranger mentality?

“You said—”

“Not how it works, kid,” he interrupted her gruffly.

“No, Hopper, what did you say?” Joyce asked, spearing some eggs with a smirk.

“Nothing.” He pointed at El. “Shut your mouth. This is not a group discussion. Eat your breakfast.” Jonathan snorted. “Don’t tempt me kid. Do not tempt me.”

"I really wanna know what you said." She shrugged. "Don't worry sweetie," she told El, " We'll talk later."

"Goddamn conspiracy." His hissed. "This is a ridiculous conversation."

"You could just answer-"

"No."

"You said you would drag-" Hopper clapped a hand over her mouth.

Joyce gave him that same flirty smile she'd given him when she was riding him, making him flush. Seriously, this was ridiculous. Yeah, yeah, whatever, the people sitting at the table had had him wrapped around their damn fingers from the get-go. Sure. But now they knew it, which was so much worse.

"Nope. I'm leaving." He put his hat on, and gulped down the rest of his coffee. The boys looked highly entertained. Too entertained. So he mussed Jonathan's hair roughly and swatted out at El. "And just for that you're walking home," he teased.

El looked pleadingly at Joyce. "I'll drive you."

“No you won’t!” Hop called back as he opened the door. Joyce could only laugh at how goofy he was acting. Maybe it was the sex or relief from the all that tension, or if he just really liked teasing the kids. Probably both, she thought with a smile.

“I’ll drive you,” she mouthed. El beamed. The door shut and a moment later Hop’s truck started before the engine cut out. Joyce snorted. He’d probably started it through the window. Another moment passed before there was a knock at the door. Joyce looked at El and Will feigning confusion.

“I wonder who that could be?” she asked, feigning exaggerated confusion. El laughed, grabbed her things, and followed Joyce to the door.

She opened it, hip checking El to keep her from running out to him. Hop stood there, hands braced on the door frame with an absolutely *stupid* look on his face. His stupid, handsome face.

“Forget something?” Joyce asked airily, making him grin.

“Couple things, actually.” He reached and snagged El under his arm, lifting her by the waist while she laughed and kicked her feet. With a little difficulty keeping his balance, he leaned in and kissed Joyce. It was a sweet, lingering mesh of lips that had her moving closer even though El was giggling like mad and Will was fake gagging in the background. She brought a hand up to his beard, pressing quick pecks to keep him with her for just a moment longer. With one last press, he pulled away and lightly knocked his forehead against hers.

“Yeah?” he said walking away, El still tucked under his arm. Joyce blushed, leaning against the doorframe.

“Yeah,” she answered.

No one really needed to ask what they meant.